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The business problem

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**BUSINESS
PROBLEMS
OF
A PROFESSION**

FREDERICK CROSBY BRUSH, D.D.S.

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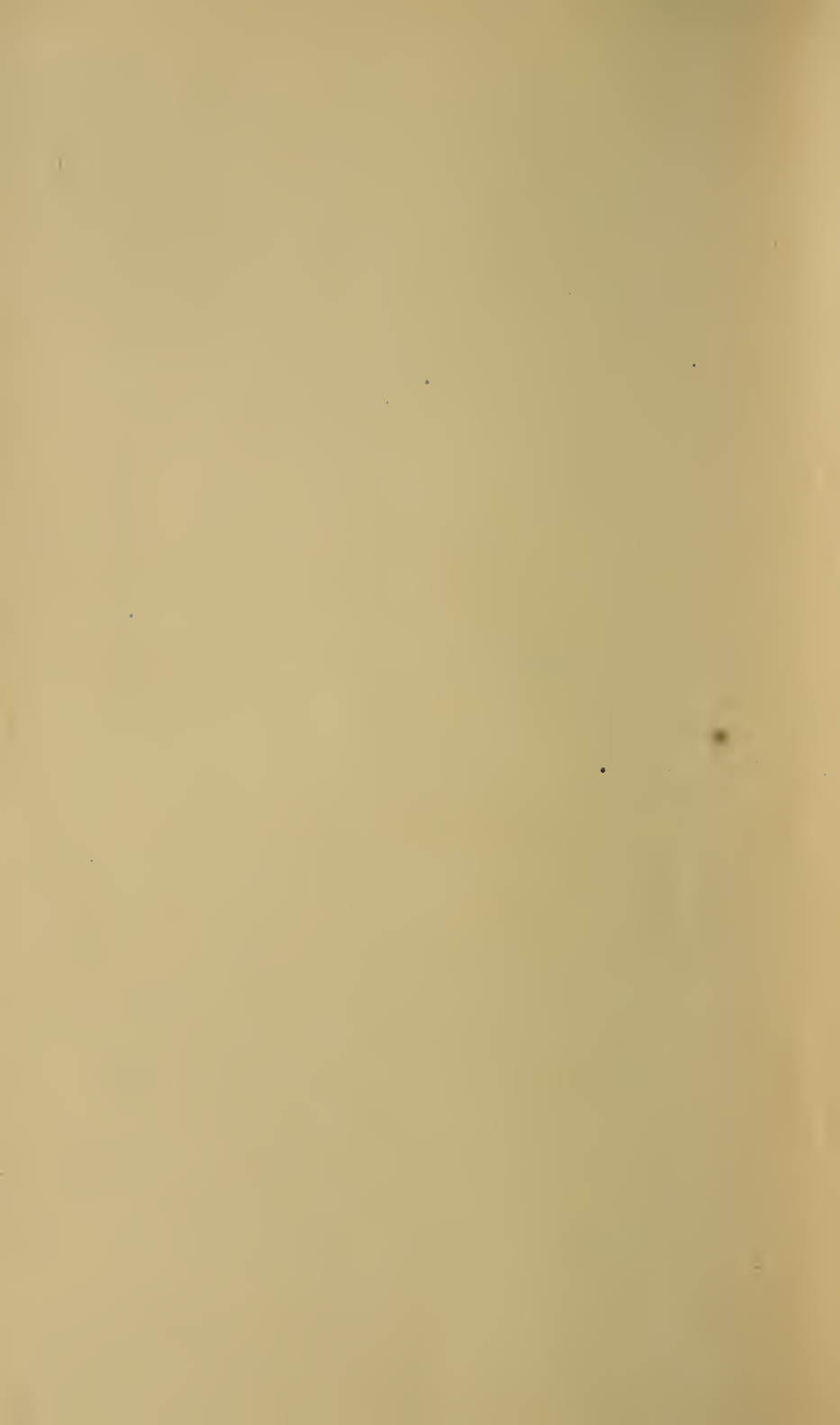
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THE BUSINESS PROBLEMS
OF A PROFESSION



THE BUSINESS PROBLEMS OF A PROFESSION

BY

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PREFACE.

THIS little book is the outgrowth of numerous short articles written for dental journals and addresses delivered before societies. If it proves of assistance to brother practitioners in solving some of their business problems, its purpose will be served.

Twenty years of varied experiences in the practice of dentistry together with extensive acquaintance among the practitioners of our chosen profession, have afforded the writer unusual opportunities for observing the conditions that prevail. He is convinced that the reason that some have not succeeded as they anticipated, has not been due to their lack of professional ability so much as to their lack of business ability and a knowledge of the business principles that are involved in all transactions.

It is the object of this book to supply information on this subject.

Although this work enters a field which is an essential element of a profession, but which has been quite universally ignored, it is not the writer's purpose to lay claim to any originality for the

Preface.

methods or their application as outlined in the text. He aims merely to present a general plan which may be a guide for those about to begin the practice of dentistry, one that is also adaptable to an established practice and which is being used successfully.

F. C. B.

THE BUSINESS PROBLEMS OF A PROFESSION.

CHAPTER I.

“ COMMENCEMENT.”

WHEN a young man leaves the hall after the college “ commencement ” exercises are over, he feels that a successful life lies before him and that all he need do is to engage an office, put up a sign, and patients will flock to his door. Some days afterwards he awakens from his dream to find that the key that unlocks the door of business success is not an elaborately engrossed diploma but that it must be slowly forged by hard, steady work guided by a fixed purpose.

As he looks about him and ponders, he begins to realize that the privilege of adding the few letters of a degree to his name has not changed the conditions of life very much for him; and that there are still many battles to be fought and won before he will be counted as an important link in the economic chain. However, he is anxious to begin at once to hew his way toward that success of which he has dreamed; but he finds confronting

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him several problems that must be solved before he can make even a fair start on his chosen career.

One of his first decisions must be whether he shall at once begin to establish a practice for himself or seek a position as assistant in some well-established practice, where he will be afforded opportunities to gain much needed experience, and a degree of self-confidence that will enable him to cope with any emergency that may arise.

A philosopher has said that a young man beginning practice for himself immediately upon leaving college, will make more mistakes that will injure his chances of success, during the first year in practice, than he will be able to overcome in the succeeding five years. This is undoubtedly true and, being the case, it will, in the long run, be of incalculable benefit to a young man to secure all the practical experience possible before beginning practice for himself, and thus escape what is otherwise a very considerable handicap.

The time devoted to gaining experience is well spent and two years is little enough, while three or four years is none too much. How to get a position without having had experience and how to get this experience without a position may seem a formidable problem, and yet it should not be hard to solve for an ambitious young man who has a good moral character and plenty of grit and determination. There are several ways of accomplish-

“ Commencement.”

ing the purpose; the most desirable one is to become associated with some well-established practitioner of good repute. Many young men have preceptors either before or during their college course, and will be able to continue on with them after graduation. To those who have no such affiliations the following suggestions are offered:

In the cities where the colleges are located there are usually one or more professional organizations which hold meetings once a month. Many of these societies welcome senior students and permit them to attend meetings without any charge for dues or assessments. At these meetings the young man will have opportunity to make many valuable acquaintances, and the chances will be good for him to effect some arrangement whereby he can become associated with one of these men. The terms and agreements in connection with such an association will depend so largely upon the individuals and general conditions, that it is not feasible to offer advice concerning them. Suffice it to say, that if an opportunity offers to become associated with a progressive and aggressive man it will be well to take advantage of it on the best terms that can be made. It will, however, behoove the young man to bear in mind that the practitioner who takes an inexperienced man into his office assumes a great moral and legal responsibility, and must give up much valuable time to the proper instruc-

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tion of such a man. So the young man should not allow his ideas of his own ability and importance to stand in the way of effecting a desirable connection.

Another way to get an opportunity to become associated with some good man is to keep in touch with the dental depots; for there is usually some one there who is a veritable information bureau regarding such things, and very likely would be able to place a man in a very desirable position. If the young graduate does not care for a city connection, then it will be well for him to make the acquaintance of the traveling salesmen visiting the territory within which he wishes to locate. When seeking the assistance of these men he should be perfectly frank with them regarding his qualifications, what he is willing to do, and the terms he will accept, but be chary of estimating the value of his practical ability.

It will also be well to watch the advertisements for assistants that appear in the various dental journals. When direct communication is finally effected with some practitioner who desires an assistant the young man should be sure to state all the facts regarding his experience. It means much inconvenience and disappointment to a busy man to find that the assistant from whom he expected immediate help, must be taught those things which will make his services of value.

“Commencement.”

There is still another avenue leading to experience that is always open—the advertising dental office. Mention of this has been left until the last for many reasons; one is that the moral pitfalls and temptations in an advertising practice are many and cannot be discussed here. Unless a young man has a strong moral character and complete mastery over himself and his passions, I should advise him to avoid seeking experience through this channel. If he is of the stuff that men are made of, however, a couple of years' experience in various offices may be of considerable value to him.

The young man who seeks a position as an assistant with the idea of obtaining as wide an experience as possible before engaging in practice for himself, will do well not to remain too long in one place. A good plan to pursue will be: first get a place where all kinds of work may be done; after a good idea has been obtained of the general conduct of a practice, seek another place where special work can be done. For instance, first get a good idea of general practice; then take up extracting; follow this by doing all kinds of gold work; spend some time doing general prosthetic work, and wind up with general operating and prophylaxis work. The man who will devote two or three years to the carrying out of such a program will have obtained in return the best post-graduate course in dentistry

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that it is possible under present conditions to receive. Do not think that such a plan is a mere theory that could not be carried out, for it has been done in a number of instances and can be again by any man who has the moral courage to undertake it and the grit to see it through.

CHAPTER II.

LOCATION.

WHERE to locate is probably the most important question that a young man will have to deal with during his entire professional career. Whether the future shall bring success or failure may depend very largely upon the decision at this time. Some men seem able to move along the line of least resistance and find good fortune always awaiting them; but there are other poor mortals who find it necessary to ponder carefully over every new move and situation, and to exercise matured judgment in order to avert a catastrophe.

This is a subject about which it is hard to offer advice; men differ so widely in temperament, individuality, and inclinations that it is difficult to foresee what conditions will have to be met. There are, however, some major things that should be given consideration when a man is selecting a location for his future activities.

The first of these is the question of health. Some men are so constituted that they are greatly affected by climatic conditions. When a man is sensitive to such influences, he should be particu-

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larly careful not to plunge into some place because there seems to be a good opportunity for immediate business. He should study all the conditions thoroughly; for health is one of the greatest business assets a man can have. If climatic conditions are such that health cannot be maintained, he will be most seriously handicapped at a time when it will seem too late to begin all over again in some place where the climate is more favorable.

To an ambitious young man a large city will seem to present unlimited possibilities. There will be opportunities to affiliate with large professional organizations, to meet and become acquainted with men of note in the profession, to build a large practice and receive high fees, and to pursue his own course through life uninterrupted by the petty criticisms that are coincident with life in many small communities. But life in a large city is not all smooth sailing. It means heavy expenses that seem to be ever increasing, meager opportunities for making social acquaintances that are worth while, inadequate means of becoming professionally known to the public, and the long heart-breaking struggle to gain a practice that yields a sufficient income to enable one to enjoy the real pleasures of a city life.

A suburban community adjacent to some large city will present opportunities that will appeal to many. In such a place the practice will be a family

Location.

one, and the clientèle principally women and children. Fees may not be as high but the expenses will be materially less.

Such communities generally present many social opportunities and advantages, and a young man with a pleasing personality should be able to make acquaintances rapidly. By exercising judgment in the making of intimate friends and by avoiding association with any particular clique, he will soon be able to determine what people are worth knowing and whose patronage he will desire. It will be well to become associated with the civic organizations and take an active part in any movement for the betterment of the place, but as far as possible avoid being mixed up in what is generally called "local politics." This advice will hold good for larger communities, for it has been observed that when a member of the medical profession succeeds in politics or becomes a politician, it is usually at the expense of professional success.

A good suburban town usually presents many almost ideal advantages. In such a place one can enjoy the pleasures of a real home with its lawn and garden, its flowers and trees and the accompanying incidentals that help to make life worth living. It is also possible to reach the city easily, which gives a progressive man an opportunity to attend and take part in the meetings of professional organizations and thus keep in touch with

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advanced theories and methods. These are advantages not to be thought lightly of when a choice is being made of a place wherein one is likely to spend the greater part of a lifetime.

A manufacturing city or town presents somewhat different conditions for consideration. Local business is dependent upon trade conditions and the steady employment of wage earners. When the country is prosperous and there is a good demand for manufactured products, the people will be employed, money will circulate freely, and all will be well. But in case of a financial panic or a general trade depression, industrial centers are usually the first to feel the effects, and a money stringency follows.

As the care of the teeth and mouth is still looked upon as somewhat of a luxury by the wage-earning class, the dentist will be the first whose business will be affected, and instead of receiving cash he will have to give credit. He will be the one whose lost time and opportunities are the hardest to make up. If the bulk of one's practice consists of wage earners or their dependents, it will be necessary to be continually on the alert in order to be prepared to meet and go safely through these periods of business depression. In such places the amount of business that a dentist can do, together with the kind of operations and the fees that can be charged, will depend very largely upon the class of people

Location.

employed and the wages they receive. If a town has industries of many different kinds, trade conditions are not likely to become as acute as they would if but one industry was depended upon. A town dependent upon one kind of industry for its prosperity should not be looked upon favorably as a place in which to locate, unless the opening seems an unusually good one.

A country town or village with a tributary farming population may possess attractions to one who will be content to lead an uneventful existence. The social requirements and activities of such places are usually decidedly limited. Any especial stimulus for mental exertion will be lacking, and he will be an unusual man indeed that does not get into a rut and drift along from day to day, following the lines of least resistance. General expenses may not be as great as in larger communities, but it will be found here as elsewhere that all things are relative and that the expense account will be in about the same ratio to the amount of business that can be done, as in other places. The gross annual practice in such communities averages about \$2,500. Many credit accounts have to be carried, and collections are slow and in small amounts. Money can be earned and by close economy it may be saved in these communities, but very seldom is money made in the sense that the term is generally used in the business world.

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BUSINESS OPENINGS.

It has been said in a general way regarding the population of communities that, five hundred people will support a physician, while at least one thousand will be required to support a dentist.

In the large cities the proportion of dentists to the population need scarcely be considered, as such places are continually growing, and there are always opportunities for aggressive and progressive men to gain a following. The same may be said of the immediate suburbs of the largest cities.

When a manufacturing city or town is being considered, a much more liberal numerical allowance should be made, for in these places the quality of the people will be of far more importance than the quantity. It will be well to inquire into the general characteristics and nationality of the wage earners, the average weekly wage received, whether continuously employed throughout the year or only during trade seasons; the average yearly income of the different classes of people comprising the population, and whether the people are thrifty and spend money judiciously, or support a large number of saloons and catch-penny stores and amusement places; for the general business conditions of the place will be very largely governed by these things.

The possibilities of building up a paying prac-

Location.

tice in a country community will depend very largely upon the productivity of the surrounding country; if it is a farming or fruit-growing center and modern methods are employed so that large returns are yielded, then the chances will be much better than they would be in a place where the soil is barren or worked out and the people only grub out a bare living, with little left to supply the needs for physical comfort.

Mention is made of these matters for the purpose of giving a general idea of some of the things worth considering when seeking a place wherein a practice may be established that will yield a suitable income.

CHAPTER III.

OFFICES.

AFTER a decision has been reached regarding a place in which to locate, the next thing will be to seek a suitable office. In the larger cities the tendency at present is to have an office in one of the modern office buildings or in some building occupied exclusively by medical specialists. Such a situation is desirable from many standpoints, but is more suitable for a man with an established practice than for one just beginning; the expenses connected with such an office are usually high, and the opportunities of securing chance or transient patients are reduced to the minimum.

A second choice might be the securing of accommodations in a private house or an apartment. This will have the advantage of bringing one in contact with a family neighborhood, but it also has its disadvantages, especially if one resides in the house; for then it will be difficult to establish and maintain suitable office hours, something which in the long run is almost imperative from a good business standpoint.

Another possible location would be in rooms

Offices.

over a store on some business street or avenue. In making such a selection care should be exercised regarding the general character of the building and its tenants, the class and kind of stores, and the accessibility, care, and condition of the entrance hall.

In a suburban place the best location is generally in a private house on the main street or in close proximity to the business center. If this is not obtainable, the next best place will be in some bank building or over the leading drug store. If possible, avoid locating over notion shops, grocery stores, or markets of any kind.

In small cities or towns it is customary to find dental offices located in business buildings on the main thoroughfares, but it will be found that here, as in suburban towns, an office in a well-situated private house will be most desirable. Above all things, avoid having an office located over a saloon or a cigar store, or in any building whose entrance or approach is a congregating place for men and street gossips. Be sure that there is nothing about the building or entrance that will deter ladies or children from feeling free to come and go at all times. These points are pertinent to any place.

When locating in a business building be sure that the entrance to the office is direct, easy of access, and that the hallways and stairs are light and kept clean. These conditions are all too frequently

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disregarded, and are noted and commented upon by patients more often than we would like to believe. First impressions are usually lasting, and it has often happened that prospective patients have turned away and gone elsewhere, when confronted by a crowded entrance or a dirty stairway leading to a dingy, unkept hallway. One would *not* expect to find a neat, wholesome gentleman and a sanitary office awaiting them in the midst of such surroundings.

In selecting an office, light and ventilation are two essentials that must be given the greatest consideration. It is a generally accepted theory that a north light is the best for operating purposes, but from having worked all around the compass it is the writer's conclusion that a southwest light presents the most advantages. From this point direct light will be obtained for the longest time during the day throughout the year; the lights and shadows from sun rays and passing clouds will cause less eye strain and fatigue than will the steady reflected light from the north. It is unhealthy to spend the greater part of the day—day in and day out—in a room into which the sun's rays do not enter. Such a condition is a greater cause of eye strain and nervous irritability than is generally realized.

Note also the toilet accommodations; for a clean, well-appointed toilet room is an important

Offices.

adjunct to a professional office and a convenience that will be greatly appreciated by patients.

Look carefully into the heating and plumbing arrangements and see that they are adequate. A city man who failed to give these things careful consideration had a rather unpleasant experience. He found an office that seemed to suit his requirements, and, after signing a lease for a term of years, moved in; when about to set up the fountain cuspidor it was discovered that the water outlet was some thirty feet away from where the operating chair must stand and that the floor was constructed of railroad iron and filled in with concrete and ashes and then covered with the usual hardwood flooring. It cost a pretty penny to overcome the difficulty.

CHAPTER IV.

OFFICE ARRANGEMENT.

THE arrangement of an office or suite of rooms will depend so much on circumstances and individual taste, that it is not practicable to do more than offer a few suggestions.

The simplest plan is to divide the room or rooms so as to present a reception room, an operating room, a dressing room, and a laboratory.

The reception room need not be large, but it should be so situated that it will be well lighted and easily ventilated. The furniture should be plain and good, and should exhibit taste rather than ornate display. Do not overcrowd the room with furniture; a few comfortable chairs and a center table are worth more than a truck load of junk. A few carefully selected high-class pictures are always desirable, but above all things avoid cluttering up the walls with cheap prints, so-called "art" calendars, amateur photographs, class pictures or diplomas, and last, but worst of all, any colored or carbon enlargements of photographs of yourself or members of your family.

Keep the table well supplied with current magazines, a few books of short stories, some well-

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selected children's books, and a daily newspaper. Don't waste money on sets of subscription books to repose peacefully (and dustily) in a case in the reception room. This refers to books containing copies of the world's famous paintings, speeches of great orators, selected poetry and choice literature, and the usual run of such things that are offered to professional men; you will never read them nor will anyone else be likely to do so. When ready to buy books, get the standard authors and miscellaneous books on subjects that are worth while—the kind that you would really like to read.

If a separate room is not available for a dressing room, sufficient space should be partitioned or screened off from the reception room to contain a coat tree, a dressing table, mirror, etc. This is a convenience that will be greatly appreciated, for few people like to leave their coats and bonnets scattered about on chairs; and ladies do not care to be compelled to arrange their hair and prepare for the street in the presence of strangers.

The operating room should have ample space for the chair, cabinets, and other necessary equipment, and also for a desk, safe, etc.; for this is the proper place for all that pertains to the business side of a practice. Some very good-looking work benches are made that may be placed in the operating room if one desires; but as the public has been accustomed to look upon the profession of

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dentistry as so largely mechanical, it would seem that if we hope to successfully combat this idea, it would be better to relegate such evidences of our mechanics to a less conspicuous place.

The laboratory should be so situated as to be of easy access from the operating room, but should be separate and distinct, so that it may be closed off tightly to prevent noise and odors from reaching the other rooms.

A better idea of the equipment necessary to meet one's requirements can be gained from the catalogs of supply houses than from anything that might be written in a book of this nature.

For decorations, plain soft colors are more pleasing than are the gaudy, flower-bedecked wall papers often used. The soft grays, greens, or browns are desirable, but red is an excitant and should not be used. In the operating room a soft gray or green will be preferable to a dead white, for that is apt to produce a glare and cause an unnecessary strain on the eyes. For the operating room, white enameled cabinets, etc., are having quite a vogue, presumably because white is the emblem of cleanliness; but white enamel can be about the dirtiest of things, for it does not show dust which is consequently very often overlooked, and when the enamel finally becomes stained it is most unsightly. Cleanliness should be a matter of principle rather than of color in an operating room.

CHAPTER V.

SIGNS.

THE question of signs will merit consideration after an office has been secured and equipped. The purpose of a sign is to furnish information and guidance. The purpose of a professional man's sign is to inform the public that a certain person is practising a certain profession in a certain place, and to serve as a guide whereby his office may be readily located. It would seem to follow that any sign that fulfilled this purpose would be proper, but this is not wholly so, for appropriateness and good taste must be considered.

A big, flaring sign with striking colors that attracts attention from a considerable distance is, indeed, a sign; but as it is an offense to the eye and indicates a lack of taste and professional dignity on the part of the one by whom it is used, it is inappropriate for anyone who wishes to attract the patronage of refined people.

On the other hand, there is the sign which is so small and indistinct and placed in such an obscure position that it can only be found and read after a most diligent search. Two such cases come read-

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ily to my mind: one is on a residence street in New York City, and the man's name is so lightly traced in the corner of the parlor window that it can be seen from the street (ten feet away) only when the light or the position of the observer is just right. In this case the number of the house is also hidden from view, so that any stranger looking for this man's office is practically compelled to seek the assistance of the neighbors or the numbers on their houses. The other case is in a country town and the office is located on the main street. I was seeking this particular man and upon inquiry was not told the house number but that his office was on a certain block. I passed along three times without locating him, and, finally, inquired again and was assured that I was on the right block. Once more I went along, peering carefully into each hallway and finally behind a half-closed outer door found his name in tiny letters upon an inner door that could not be seen from the street under ordinary conditions.

Neither extreme serves the real purpose of a good sign, for one keeps desirable patients away by offending their sense of good taste, while the other exhausts their patience.

Some vulgar men have gone to such an extreme in flaunting flaring signs that ultra-ethical men propose going to the other extreme and advocating the doing away altogether with signs of any de-

Signs.

scription. Both attitudes are unwise and undesirable.

If the office selected be in a private house situated close to the street, a sign might be placed in a front window where it can be readily seen by the passer-by. In this case it should be of modest size and of the nature of those generally used by medical men; it may include with the name, the letters of the professional degrees or the words dentist or dental specialist, in order not to be mistaken for a physician. If the house be well back from the street, so that a sign in the window would not be desirable, it can be placed on the porch railing or steps at the entrance but so situated as to be plainly visible.

When an office is situated on an upper floor of a business building, it is well to have a small sign or tablet placed in the entry with the number of the floor or room, together with the name upon it to serve as a guide for finding the office. If in this case the office windows can be readily seen from the street, the name and specialty can be placed in one of them with modest-sized plain gold letters.

Any of the so-called decorative or plain wood signs attached to the outside of a building are usually objectionable and in poor taste. It seems unnecessary to comment on poster signs, announcing special kinds of work, price, etc., that remind one of a fire sale in a shoddy clothing store.

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In selecting the lettering for a sign, avoid all attempts at ornate display, and fancy letters of all kinds—stick to the plain, quiet dignity of the simple Roman letter which can be read at a glance.

One of the antiquated and illogical notions of the medical professions regarding signs is, that it is not strictly proper for a specialist to announce his specialty upon his sign. This may be all right from the ultra-conservative standpoint from which they argue, but it does not seem to take into consideration the convenience of one of the most interested parties—the public. The medical man needs the public (patients) quite as much or more than the public needs him, and yet if he adheres strictly to the code laid down for his guidance he must not do anything that will enable the general public to know that he is in business and desires their patronage, or that he has any especial fitness for special work and desires to practise that exclusively.

From the standpoint of the public, consider how difficult it is to locate and determine anything about some individual practitioner, to learn something of his habits, his character, temperament, individuality, etc. It would seem as though the public was expected, when in need of medical services, to walk down some street, or streets, until a sign could be found, use second sight to determine whether it is the office of an oculist, aurist, dentist,

Signs.

surgeon, or general practitioner, and then walk in and unburden itself to whatever sort of man happened to be behind the sign.

Or else the seeker is expected to inquire of some friend, in whose advice and judgment he has no great amount of confidence and who, perhaps, in turn is not wholly satisfied and would like to make a change of dentist if it were not too much like making a leap in the dark.

Consider how disquieting it is to one's peace of mind, when, in an emergency, one tries to locate a physician and in desperation calls up someone at random only to find that it is a dentist or an oculist or some specialist other than is needed, and that valuable time has been lost.

Does it not seem reasonable that if we desire the good will and patronage of the public, we should show consideration enough to designate on our signs or cards the special branch of the profession that we desire to pursue, in order to spare their time and patience?

The medical profession has made great strides and kept pace with the times in nearly everything except its code—but with that, if some man dare differ with the literal precepts, although not the spirit, he is frowned upon as a heretic (but sometimes secretly commended for his courage).

The objection to a man announcing himself as a specialist originated at a time when specializa-

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tion, as it is practised to-day, was literally unknown. The position taken at that time may have been justified, but it seems as though it is now time for a liberal profession to take more liberal views and meet present-day problems in a logical way.

CHAPTER VI.

STATIONERY.

A PROFESSIONAL man's stationery is his envoy to people whom he cannot at the time meet personally. It represents him, and by it he is frequently judged. This being the case, it behooves the dentist to spare no expense, but to have all stationery of the best quality and in good taste, so that the impression conveyed may be favorable. The printing on the business cards and letter-heads used by some dentists, to say nothing of the quality of the paper, resembles that used by emigrant sign painters and Polack tailors. Their visible cheapness stamps the user as cheap also. They contain much information that is nonessential, unnecessary, and out of place. If one wishes to advertise, it is better to do it deliberately than to have what should be a professional card look like a handbill.

A professional card should be engraved—that is essential. The lettering should be plain and clear—that is good taste. The card should be small in size and contain the name and full address (street, number, and town). It should designate that one

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is a dentist, by the use of the letters of the professional degree after the name, or the words dentist or dental surgeon in small letters underneath the name. If it is to be the card of a specialist then the name of the specialty should be placed in the lower left corner. It is permissible to mention the telephone number and the office hours if one desires to do so, but as these are usually understood and only tend to detract from the neatness and dignity of the card, it is generally well to leave them off.

Letter-paper should be of the very best quality and of the standard sizes only—the small double sheet for notes and the medium size, square, two-fold sheet for letters, with envelopes to match.

The letter-head should consist of the name and full address and should be embossed; if this is not obtainable the printing should resemble engraving as closely as possible. The style of lettering should be the same as that used on the professional card. The imprint should be in the center near the upper border or in the upper left corner.

It is now customary, and requested by the Post Office Department, that the name and address be placed upon envelopes to facilitate the prompt return of undelivered mail. For professional stationery the imprint should be upon the flap of the envelope and of the same character, either embossed or printed, as that used for the letter-head.

Stationery.

The stamped envelopes issued by the Post Office Department are not good form for professional use.

Never use for correspondence the ruled sheets that come put up in blocks and pads. It seems hardly necessary to mention these matters, but from an extensive acquaintance with the correspondence of professional men it appears that these points are not generally known or at least not observed.

CHAPTER VII.

ADVERTISING.

THE subject of advertising has been a stumbling block in the minds of professional men for many, many years, and even now, when the subject is casually mentioned, some one is pretty sure to figuratively throw up his hands and exclaim that to advertise is not "ethical." Such a sweeping statement indicates sheer thoughtlessness or else a lack of sufficient information on the subject.

The real purpose of advertising is "to inform the public concerning" some definite thing. This certainly is neither morally nor ethically wrong. If there is anything amiss, then it must be the kind of advertising used or the way in which it is employed, for there are about as many ways of advertising as there are leaves on a full-grown tree.

There was a time, it is true, when advertising was employed almost exclusively for the purpose of deceiving and decoying gullible people; and consisted principally of extravagant, untruthful or deceitful statements, usually blazoned forth in a vulgar manner. This sort of thing has been as universally condemned by honest commercial men

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as by members of the professions. To-day the men engaged in preparing advertisements have as high ideals, are as respected and as well paid as any class of men engaged in earning a livelihood.

The ever-changing economic conditions, the centralization and congestion of population, improved transit facilities, and the migratory habits of well-to-do people have served to make advertising almost a necessity for the carrying on of a successful business. This condition is recognized and taken advantage of by men engaged in every kind of business except the professions. Professional men have made progress in every branch of their work except along purely business lines. Instead of giving the business side of their practice the consideration that it deserves, they have been content to adhere to precedents that were established to meet economic conditions existing fifty or more years ago. Precedent is nearly always a brake on progress.

In formulating the Code of Ethics of the National Dental Association, it has been recognized that advertising will, whether or no, enter into the business conduct of a professional practice; and an effort was made to define the methods of advertising that are objectionable, and also to state what will be considered acceptable and ethical. Note very carefully the wording of the paragraph that refers to this subject.

ARTICLE II. SECTION 2.

“It is unprofessional to resort to public advertisement, cards, handbills, posters, or signs, calling attention to peculiar styles of work, lowness of prices, special modes of operating, or to claim superiority over neighboring practitioners; to publish reports of cases or certificates in the public prints, to circulate or recommend nostrums, or to perform any similar acts. But nothing in this section shall be so constructed as to imply that it is unprofessional for dentists to announce in the public prints, or by cards, simply their names, occupation, and place of business, or in the same manner to announce their removal, absence from, or return to business, or to issue to their patients appointment cards having a fee bill for professional services thereon.”

The wording of this paragraph is somewhat ambiguous and has been generally interpreted to mean a wholesale condemnation of all advertising; but a careful perusal will show that it aims to condemn all advertising that could be considered in any way offensive, vulgar or even undignified, and mentions specifically certain kinds of advertising that are considered in this category.

It would apparently seem unnecessary to insert such a clause in a code intended for the guidance

of professional men, but the fact is that professional men in general have such a limited knowledge of good business methods that when some of them find the need of an increasing income in order to keep going, instead of carefully studying the situation, they jump to the conclusion that advertising will solve the problem; and then instead of seeking the advice of an experienced advertising man, they employ some cheap printer or sign painter and use copy and devices that any competent advertising or commercial man would be ashamed of.

It is quite evident that professional services cannot be properly advertised by the same methods as are used for the sale of merchandise, but there are many ways by which a professional man may become known in a community without resorting to vulgar advertising or even to the subterfuges that are so often employed. How easy it is to recall incidences of young doctors attending church and occupying a prominent seat only to be called out in the midst of the services, by prearrangement; or again of their dashing out of their offices and driving furiously down the street only to idle away some time in an unfrequented place and then driving rapidly back again; and the dentist who makes it a point to get a drop of creosote or some other vile-smelling drug upon his clothes just before attending some function, or else carries a

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mouth mirror conspicuously displayed in one of his pockets.

This reminds me of an incident that occurred at a dental convention recently, when a prominent lecturer at a leading Eastern dental college turned and asked if I happened to have a mouth mirror in my pocket, as he had forgotten his. My reply was that I did not consider a man's pocket a very sanitary place to carry surgical instruments. Again there are the subterfuges employed to get one's name into the news columns of local papers and to have press notices printed—gratis. These attempts are made so often that it is no wonder that newspaper men are disgusted when they hear professional men talk about its being unethical to advertise. It certainly is unethical for a man to try to get something without paying for it.

The code states suitable ways for professional men to use newspaper advertising, and for which regular advertising rates should be paid; but, strange to say, these methods are not generally employed except in communities where it would seem unnecessary from an advertising standpoint. It is not at all uncommon to find in the local papers of small communities a space devoted to the business cards of professional men.

It is hardly possible for a professional man who has ambition and energy, to be located in a town of fifteen thousand or less, more than two weeks,

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without being quite generally talked about and the observed of all observers. This being the case, it would seem hardly necessary to resort to newspaper advertising in such communities. In the largest cities, however, where it is next to impossible for a man to become known outside of a very limited circle, these methods are not employed, in fact are frowned upon by the dental societies, and the newspaper field is left entirely to the men who disgrace their calling by their vulgar methods and untruthful statements. In these cities are large numbers of people who come, go, and move about and who have become accustomed to turning to the advertising columns of the daily papers to find the places that will supply their needs. In doing this they naturally see and are influenced by these vulgar dental advertisements and soon come to judge dentistry and dentists in general, by these standards. The general public does not know and cares less about the codes and so-called "ethics" of professional men. It does know that reliable and successful commercial men advertise and state frankly what they have to offer, and that they may be depended upon; and naturally they think the same must be true of dental establishments, and that those who advertise are the ones that have built up a large business from the same causes.

Every little while there is talk among dental society members about the need of putting the

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“Dental Parlors” out of business, but a way to do it is not often suggested. Newspaper men, who are close observers of the situation, claim that if the good men in the profession would publish their cards and other necessary information so that the general public could note the difference and be able to pick and choose, it would not be long before the present vulgar advertising matter would be refused or withdrawn and the “Dental Parlors” forced into the background.

This seems logical, and if carried out should work to the advantage of the public as well as to the profession. Such a course is fully sanctioned by the code and therefore “ethical.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ATTENDANT.

FROM a business standpoint a young woman attendant is an essential element of a well-organized office. In the care of the reception and dressing rooms there are many things that will need the touch of a woman's hands in order to keep them looking neat and attractive. In the operating room the sterilization and general care of the instruments and cabinets can best be done by a well-trained young woman.

Time is a professional man's chief asset, and he should never use it for doing minor things that can be relegated to an assistant whose services are worth but a nominal sum. In other words—if a man's time is worth five dollars an hour he cannot afford to spend it doing the things that he can get another to do for about five dollars a week. It is unreasonable to expect patients to be willing to pay several dollars an hour for professional services when a large part of that time includes the doing of petty things that are merely incidental to the operation. This is a point that is frequently overlooked by young practitioners, and in a spirit of

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economy they waste many minutes of a patient's time and hours of their own in doing trivial things. This is not only being "penny wise," but it is poor business management and tends to lengthen a man's working hours into the time when he should be getting rest and recreation to keep himself up to the highest standard of efficiency. When a man is not actually engaged in operating or doing those things which other hands cannot do for him, he should be free to employ his mind in working out professional and business details that will tend toward the betterment of his practice.

The attendant should be trained to assume the responsibility of the general care of the offices; to receive patients and look after their comfort; to answer the telephone and make appointments; take charge of the supplies, and keep plenty always on hand; look after the laundry and see that the chair is always dressed with clean linen; sterilize and polish instruments; assist during the various operations; open and close the office, and, in fact, do everything possible that will tend to leave the operator's hands and mind free to attend to the details of the case before him.

In some cases the keeping of the books and records can be turned over to her, but unless she is to be a permanent fixture, is close-mouthed and thoroughly trustworthy, it is not well to do this; for it is not nice to have one's business affairs, the amount

of the business and one's income and the financial relations with patients the subject of gossip among a girl's family or friends. The keeping of the books and records can be so simplified as to require but a few minutes' time each day and a professional man can better afford to keep the knowledge of these matters to himself.

Another point of great importance is that the right sort of an attendant will be an effectual check against unseemly conversation on the part of indiscreet patients; be a protection against blackmail and an important witness in case of suits for malpractice. It is extremely unwise and hazardous for a man to perform any operation for a stranger, particularly a woman, without an attendant being present. The administration of an anesthetic should never be made except in the presence of a third party, and if the patient happens to be a young girl or a neurotic woman it will be still better to have a fourth party present—one of them to be a friend of the patient. Too great stress cannot be laid on the importance of these points. Many men have been fortunate enough to go through their professional careers without any unpleasant incidents; but one such is enough to wreck a man's reputation and cling to him for life.

CHAPTER IX.

FEES.

THE fee problem is the most important of any that a dentist has to solve, yet it has received the least practical consideration.

The plan of having a fixed price per filling, crown, etc., according to the material used, originated in the days when dentistry was little more than a special trade and has been handed down from preceptor to student ever since. It is another of the things that has become so firmly established through custom and precedent, that it has been almost exempt from discussion by professional societies, and yet, from a truly professional and business standpoint, the method is unreasonable and unjust to all parties concerned.

According to this way of basing fees, the value of the materials used is considered of more importance than the services rendered. The method is not elastic, for no allowance is made for the kind or position of the cavity, the difficulties of accurate preparation, the time involved, the temperament of the patient, the equipment required, lost time from broken appointments or any of the many de-

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tails that are involved in various operations. It resolves itself into purely a matter of how many fillings at a definite price per filling.

The establishing of such a method will, in the long run, prove to be a considerable disadvantage. Let us follow the workings of the system and see how this may be.

A young man selects a location and begins practice. He soon learns the scale of fees of his neighboring practitioners and adopts it; or, possibly, he may establish a scale that is somewhat lower, thinking thereby to sooner gain a following. He takes the requisite time to perform each operation to the best of his ability that he may gain a reputation for good work and attract more patients. In time he finds that his practice has grown so that he has all that he can comfortably attend to during reasonable working hours. About this time he is also likely to find that the expenses of maintaining his office and equipment, together with his personal responsibilities and expenses, have increased to such an extent that a much larger income is needed. If he studies the situation he will find he is not getting any better fees for fillings, crowns, etc., than he did when he first began practice, although he has more experience, better judgment and increased skill, and has kept pace with the times in methods and improved equipment. So far, the reward for his efforts has been

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an increase of patronage, but this has brought him to a parting of the ways; he feels that he must, and is entitled to, increase his income, but finds it can only be done at the expense of either his health or his operations. He can increase his working hours and become a veritable slave, toiling days, nights, and Sundays, and be content with having it said that he has such a large practice that he hasn't time for a rest or vacation, and in this way help verify the mortality records which say that the average period of life for a dentist is forty-five years; or else he may cut corners on his work and become a nervous wreck, trying to do two operations in the time which he formerly took for doing one.

A method which places a man in such a dilemma at the height of his career must surely be faulty. A satisfactory reason has never been given for having a fixed fee for each filling, crown, etc. It surely is not logical, nor is it based upon any definite idea of covering the cost of the material, the cost of the operation, the maintenance of the office, or of producing a definite income for the operator. The progress that has been made in the methods of operating has called for improved and expensive equipment, the standard of office furnishings has been very materially raised, the general expense of conducting a suitable office is continually increasing, the social demands upon professional men

have become greater, but this antiquated method makes no provision for meeting these increased expenses. Many men who have been years in practice are not able to earn any more in a given time, by this method, than they did twenty years ago, and yet their expenses have been steadily increasing.

About the only purpose that this method has served has been to fix in the public mind the idea that a filling is merely a filling, and that it is the material for which they pay, that the time and skill spent in preliminary treatment do not count; that examinations are to be made and consultations and advice given without charge; that when dentures are to be made the surgical removal of useless teeth is to be done free, and that it is only when materials are used that a bill should be rendered. In other words, it has served to put dentistry on a plane with the dealers in merchandise—no materials, no charge. The years spent and expenses incurred in acquiring knowledge and skill count only as a means of getting more trade. The man who keeps abreast of the times, attends professional meetings and clinics, reads the latest professional journals and books and is continually improving his technique, is expected to sell his services for the same price per filling, etc., as does the other kind of man; his reward is in the possibly increased number of his customers. All of which means that if he

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wishes to increase his income so as to be reimbursed for this outlay, he must labor an increased number of hours and thereby wear himself out that much quicker. Ah! but we must not forget the glory of having such a big practice. But glory is an empty bubble when one is worn out and bills are pressing.

This method of charging for services is unreasonable and unjust to patients in that it makes no distinctions. The patient that aims to take good care of his teeth and visits the dentist frequently, coming with a clean mouth and small cavities, is expected to pay the same price per filling as the one who neglects even the simplest laws of hygiene and appears only after long intervals, with a mouth reeking with filth and with cavities so extensive and complicated as to frequently require considerable treatment before they are in a condition to be properly filled. Under these same conditions a crown is considered as merely a crown, and no distinction is made in price between the case where the root merely requires proper shaping to receive the crown and the one where extensive treatment is required, possibly involving the treatment and cure of a chronic alveolar abscess.

Again, no allowance is made for the difference in the temperament of patients. The patient who is always prompt in keeping engagements, sits quietly and allows the operator to work quickly and without unnecessary interruptions, is expected

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to pay as much for each operation as the one who is generally late in keeping an appointment, restive and fussy, and wastes the operator's time with unnecessary questions, gossip, and general indecision. In fact, the method considers a patient as being merely a patient and a cavity as merely a hole—requiring a filling, at a uniform price, according to the kind of material used. Occasionally a slight difference in price is made—said to be due to the size of the filling, but it is more apt to be from a sizing up of the patient. All of which is illogical, unreasonable, and unjust.

However, there is a method of basing fees that has none of these objections and which seems to be perfectly logical, reasonable and just to all parties concerned, and that is founded on good business principles. This method will be considered in Chapter X.

CHAPTER X.

ESTIMATING THE COST.

PROBABLY no other class of men carrying on business know so little about the general principles underlying business transactions as professional men.

In all lines of general business it is considered essential that the cost of the thing to be disposed of shall be known before fixing the selling price, and yet it is customary for professional men to establish a scale of fees for their services without having any definite idea about what it actually costs them to render the service, nor is this scale based upon any plan for producing a definite income.

A professional man usually adopts the scale of fees that he finds already established in the community where he begins practice and continues to render his services at the same rate during the rest of his career. This is particularly true of dentists. Most of them are even now rendering their services for the same remuneration that was established many, many years ago. This is in spite of the fact that the cost of obtaining a professional education

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is now very much greater, and the general cost of living and the maintenance of a practice have very materially increased, to say nothing of the progress that has been made in dental science and the increased cost of the services rendered.

The excuse has been that the cost of professional services cannot be estimated as can that of merchandise, and so the fee must be based on what the dentist *thinks* the patient can or will pay. It has been quite the general impression that there was no method by which the cost of dental services could be estimated except by possibly considering the first cost of the materials used. As a consequence, many men have labored under the delusion that unless materials were used in connection with an operation there was no direct expense attached; and also that if there was any time during office hours when a dentist was not engaged in earning something, he was not suffering any loss. These ideas are certainly erroneous, for a dentist is under a direct expense every minute of his office hours, and besides, there *is* a method of determining what this expense may be.

In a commercial business the selling price of an article is fixed with reference to its actual cost to the retailer. This is determined by adding to the first cost of the article a given percentage of the cost of distribution, the interest on the capital invested, and a certain allowance for covering profit

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or loss. The term "cost of distribution" is a general one and covers the cost of maintaining the necessary establishments, insurance, the salaries of the proprietor and employees, and any and every item that has any bearing upon the cost of conducting the business.

A similar plan may be used for determining the cost of maintaining a dental practice, and by knowing the cost it will be possible to formulate a scale of fees that will be equitable.

In applying this plan the first item to be considered will be the capital invested. The first investment of capital will be for the obtaining of a professional education. The amount involved may be determined by figuring the cost of college tuition and fees, of books, instruments and supplies required, of board and general living expenses during the college years, and the amount of lost earnings during the period. Five thousand dollars has been considered a fair estimate of the total cost of obtaining a professional education under present conditions, and for the purposes of illustration, this sum will be taken as the amount of capital thus invested.

The next investment will be for the equipping of a suitable office. The average office having modern furnishings and equipment will probably inventory at about \$2,000. This gives a total of \$7,000 as representing the amount of capital that

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is invested in the business. If this amount of money were invested in mortgages or in securities it would yield an income of about six per cent, and it should at least yield the same amount from having been invested in the dentist's own business. The interest on the investment at six per cent should be considered as one of the fixed expenses of the business.

The next point to be considered in applying this plan will be the estimated expenses of conducting the business per annum. The first item will be the necessary sum required to cover the depreciation and cost of renewal of the furniture and equipment. The serviceable life of such things is usually considered as being about ten years, and it is customary to set aside ten per cent of their original cost each year, to cover the expense of their replacement. Another item will be the amount of the premiums on an insurance policy, taken on the life of the operator and made payable to the business (estate). The amount of the policy should be governed by the amount of business that the operator can produce; that is to say, if the gross business amounts to \$5,000 then the insurance may be for a like amount; because this will represent his producing value to the business. This insurance policy becomes a collateral of the business and will be found particularly valuable in adjusting the affairs in case of such an emergency as the sudden

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death of the operator, and will also be found an advantage in securing or establishing a business credit.

The next items will be the general expenses connected with the carrying on of the business. First of these will be the fire insurance premium, for it is always wise to be protected against loss. Following this will come the rent, heat, light, janitor services, telephone, etc. The next in order will be the estimated amount of dental supplies required during the year. After this there will be the yearly salary of the young woman attendant. The next important item to be considered will be the salary for the dentist himself. At this point it may be well to state that there is one important thing that should be fully understood and kept constantly in mind during all business transactions, and that is: In dealing with a practice from a business standpoint the practitioner should consider himself and the practice as two separate and distinct parties, and his personal relation to the business as merely that of an employee. This is one of the essential features of good business management.

Regarding the amount of salary that the dentist will be entitled to—while this must be governed very largely by the amount of business he can produce, yet it will be necessary for him to look ahead and provide for an income sufficient to cover his personal requirements. A young and inexperi-

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enced operator will not be able to command as much business as an older practitioner and should not expect to draw as much salary from his business, but he should try to plan his business affairs so that as his experience and skill increase, he will be enabled to draw an increased salary each year.

Still another important item will be the incidental expense. This account should cover the cost of all stationery, postage, minor office supplies and everything that in any way pertains to the general maintenance of the office or the improvement of the dentist as an operator. By this is meant all society dues, the expenses connected with the attendance of clinics, study courses, etc., the cost of books, subscriptions to dental journals, books and magazines for the reception-room table, etc. These items are generally overlooked in making up the expense account and yet they are all legitimate charges, as they are for the betterment of the practice.

When this schedule has been put together it will appear somewhat as follows:

Original Investment.

Professional education	\$5,000.00
Furnishings and equipment	2,000.00
Total	\$7,000.00

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Estimated Expenses for the Year.

Interest on investment.....	\$420.00
Depreciation and replacement.....	200.00
Life insurance premium.....	
Fire insurance premium.....	
Rent	
Heat, light, janitor service.....	
Telephone, etc.	
Dental supplies	
Attendant's salary	
Personal salary	
Incidental expenses	
Total.....	

In making up the schedule of estimated yearly expense, figures have not been carried out after the various items, for they will vary considerably according to the community, the kind of practice and conditions generally; but if the practitioner who desires to use this plan will fill in the amounts with his own figures he will be enabled to determine the approximate cost of conducting his practice.

With the amount of the total yearly expense known, the next problem is to determine how this may be apportioned so that each working day may bear its own quota.

CHAPTER XI.

TIME.

THE practice of dentistry differs from that of other professions in the nature of the work and the way services are rendered. A dentist must have a general knowledge of medical science and be familiar with parts of many of the arts and mechanical trades, yet with all this his earning power depends almost entirely on the exercises of fingercraft. Instrumentation is a feature of all the operations, and time is an important factor in their proper performance. The amount of time required is governed very largely by the nature of the operation and the general conditions, such as the temperament of the patient, accessibility, etc.

This being the case, it is plainly seen that time is an important factor in all operations, that it very largely determines the number that may be performed and thus has a very material bearing on the earning power of the operator. How much time, then, during the course of a year, will be at the command of a practitioner who desires to retain his health and vitality, maintain himself at the highest standard of mental and physical efficiency

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for his work, and also have time to enjoy the pleasures and recreation of cultured people, in which to earn a sufficient amount to cover the yearly expense and make a reasonable profit besides?

This may be determined by a process of elimination. First to be considered will be the question of working on Sundays and holidays. While there may be good reasons why physicians should be on duty on Sundays and holidays there are practically none why dentists should be.

Emergencies may arise at such times requiring the services of a dentist in order to relieve suffering, but it certainly is not necessary for the dentist to keep regular office hours on these days in order to meet these emergencies.

The physician's work differs from that of the dentist in that a large part of it consists of making calls which take him out into the fresh air and sunshine, where there is an everchanging scene to rest his eyes, mind, and nerves, and thus he is enabled to stand the strain of long hours for a continuous number of days. The work of the dentist necessitates his spending his working hours within the confines of a small room, operating by a steady light from which the direct rays of the sun are usually eliminated. The effect of such a condition is a tremendous strain upon the vitality and nervous energy of the one subjected to it. It therefore follows that the dentist of all men is the one who

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should embrace every opportunity for rest and recreation in the fresh air and sunshine.

The fact probably is that most dentists who have established office hours on Sundays and holidays do so from a mercenary rather than a humanitarian spirit. The old plan of a fixed price for the different kinds of filling, etc., has made it seem necessary to work long hours and on Sundays, that a dentist may increase his income. It is, however, really unnecessary for a dentist to have office hours on Sundays and holidays, and it is never good business policy. These days should therefore be deducted; thus eliminating sixty days in a year.

The next to be considered is the question of a vacation. How much time should be taken for a complete change and rest by one who is engaged in such a confining and nerve-exhausting occupation as dentistry? It has been well said by a professional man that he could do twelve months' work in eleven, but that he could not do it in twelve and do it satisfactorily. If a dentist wishes to maintain for a long period a high standard of mental and physical efficiency, then he must take sufficient time, whenever needed, to thoroughly recuperate, and he must also have an opportunity to take an interest in other things, so as not to become narrow-minded and self-centered.

Four weeks' rest seems little enough for a pro-

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fessional man. While some men would prefer to take the four weeks consecutively, there will be others who will find it more beneficial or convenient to divide the time. One good plan is to take a week in the spring and another in the autumn, as they will then come at a time when one is working hard and most needs the change. The other two weeks, or more, may be taken in mid-summer when business is slack and most people are away.

Allowing four weeks for a vacation period, there will be practically ninety days, all told, eliminated from the year, leaving two hundred and seventy-five days within which to earn sufficient money to meet all the expenses and provide something for old age and the proverbial "rainy day."

Next should be determined the available number of working hours in each day. As most dental operations require the undivided attention of the operator for periods of an hour or more, this protracted concentration becomes a very considerable nervous strain and tends to limit the amount of work that can be safely undertaken, if health and vitality are to be maintained. A business day of six or seven hours is all that a professional man should undertake, and if the office hours are arranged to be from 9 A.M. to 4 or 5 P.M., they will cover the time that is most suitable and the period when the light is the best. It is poor business policy and decidedly unwise from a health standpoint

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to have evening office hours or to do work by an artificial light, except in cases of emergency.

If the office hours are arranged to cover a period of seven hours it will be found, owing to interruptions and the time lost while changing patients, that there will be but five, or possibly six, hours that are occupied with work for which a charge can be made.

Given the total amount of the fixed and estimated expenses for the year, together with the number of business days decided upon, it is but a simple matter to determine the proportionate expense for each day. If this amount is again divided by the number of actual earning hours it will give the expense per hour.

Thus it is shown that time is a very important factor to a dentist, as each hour represents a definite amount of expense that must be met in order to conduct a practice successfully.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOUR FEE.

HAVING found that it does cost a definite amount per hour to maintain a practice and knowing what that amount is, the next step is to fix upon a fee that will be sufficient to cover this expense and yield a reasonable profit. Such a procedure is essential for the successful conduct of a business; is perfectly legitimate and fair to all parties concerned.

In determining what this amount (the fee) shall be, it is necessary to take into consideration and make allowances for lost time, uncollectable accounts, etc. As a general proposition twenty-five per cent may be considered a fair amount to represent such losses and another twenty-five per cent may represent a reasonable profit. These percentages will vary, however, according to the individual practice.

The actual cost plus fifty per cent will represent the amount that must be earned and charged each hour in order to meet expenses, yield an income and profit, and have a successful business. Knowing now that a definite amount must be charged for

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each hour or fraction thereof, it becomes essential that such a degree of skill and speed in operating be developed as will make it possible to render a fair amount of service in return for this fee. It is not called for, nor is it wise, for an operator to work at race-horse speed, but the work should proceed systematically and steadily at a rate that will neither excite nor overtire the patient; and the operating equipment should be so arranged that no time need be lost. Sufficient time should be taken to attend to all the details of the case in hand, no matter what it may be, and when it is finished the amount of the fee will be governed by the amount of time that has been devoted to that patient.

In this way the patient only pays for what he gets and the operator is paid for all that he does.

CHAPTER XIII.

APPOINTMENTS.

IN a practice that is conducted on the time basis it is not desirable to have patients dropping in with the expectation of receiving immediate attention or to have the reception room filled with waiting people. It is far better to have it understood that all operations are performed by appointment only. One or two hours a day should be set aside for consultations, examinations and emergency work, and, as far as possible, such work should be attended to during those hours. When patients are to return for some specific work a definite appointment should be made for a stated time, and it should be thoroughly impressed upon them that a certain amount of time has been reserved for them exclusively and that, if through any unforeseen circumstance they find themselves unable to keep the engagement, suitable notice must be given or else a loss will be entailed for which they will be expected to pay. If a patient makes an engagement under these conditions, it becomes a legal contract and will be held as such if it should become necessary to go to court in order to collect an account.

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In making these appointments enough time should be reserved for each one to permit of meeting any conditions that may arise and of giving proper attention to all the details of the case. It will be found that, as a rule, about four or five such appointments a day will be all that can be taken care of during suitable office hours. When all the time for one day has been allotted, fill the hours of the next, and the next, and so on, as far ahead as the practice may warrant. Do not increase the working hours of any day or days just because of the number of patients asking for time, but assign them a future hour in the order in which they come. The reason and policy of this will be discussed in Chapter XIX.

With regard to broken appointments, it is well to have it understood that all lost time will be charged for, but there are times and circumstances when it may not be advisable to adhere too strictly to this rule. Unless some such understanding is had with patients they will get the idea that an appointment not kept does not entail any loss, and form the habit of needlessly breaking appointments.

As a general thing the full charge for all time reserved should be made in case of a broken appointment; but there will be times when it is advisable to make only a portion of this charge. The patient should then be given to understand that

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this is not the general rule but that an exception has been made in his case. When charging for a broken appointment some allowance should be made if it has been possible to fill the time or some portion of it.

If a patient comes in five, ten or fifteen minutes late and the operator has been ready and waiting during that time, the charge should be made for the full time just the same. If the patient is a half hour late he should be made to lose the entire engagement and other appointment be given him, and a full charge made for the lost time unless a very satisfactory excuse be given.

An operator should always try and be as prompt in keeping appointments with his patients as he expects them to be with him.

CHAPTER XIV.

RECEPTION OF PATIENTS.

THE way a person is received in an office may have considerable bearing upon his decision whether to become or remain a patient or not.

It should be the duty of the young lady attendant to answer the door as promptly as possible, learn the wishes of the caller and make him feel at ease until the operator has an opportunity to speak with him. In the case of agents, traveling salesmen or a patient who merely wishes an appointment, the attendant will probably be able to attend to the business without disturbing the operator; if, however, it should be a patient really desirous of speaking with the doctor, or a brother professional man, he should be announced at once and word returned how soon the operator will be able to speak with him. It will mean a good deal sometimes, if the operator will but merely step to the door of the reception room and himself tell the patient how soon he will be at liberty to talk with him.

It is bad policy to leave anyone to cool their

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heels in a reception room not knowing whether they are to be kept waiting five minutes or an hour. Their time may be quite as valuable as the doctor's, and they might prefer to spend it elsewhere, particularly if their business with him would take but a moment to transact. In the case of a brother professional man, it is but courtesy that he should be seen at the earliest possible moment and not be detained one minute longer than necessary. If it happens that the operator is really engaged upon some work that cannot be left for sometime, it is better that the attendant should, from time to time, speak to the person waiting and inform him of the circumstances and that the doctor regrets keeping him waiting so long and that he will be ready to see him soon.

Sometimes a professional man gets the idea if he keeps people waiting for a long time before speaking with them, that they will be impressed with the idea that he is an important and a very busy man. Well, it may, but it certainly is not very courteous.

It may not be amiss to mention one person's experience in two dental offices in the same town. This person had occasion to call upon a dentist and accepted the invitation upon the door to walk in. There was no one in sight to receive him, although a voice could be heard in a distant room. He took a seat and waited—and waited. At the expiration

Reception of Patients.

of one-half hour he became disgusted and walked out. During the entire time there had been nothing to indicate to him that his presence was even known, but being a gentleman he did not feel called upon to make a disturbance in order to attract some one's attention. He went from this office to another, up a flight of stairs into a hall in the center of a number of living rooms with the doors all open. While debating which door to enter he noticed that he was being observed by a young woman in one of the front rooms, but she gave no sign that she saw him and quickly disappeared behind a screen. It was afterwards learned that this was the operating room and that she was the attendant. The reception room was finally discovered and other people found waiting. When one patient was dismissed another one was signalled to, from a passageway leading through to the operating room, but neither the attendant nor the doctor came into the reception room nor where either could see who was waiting, or speak to them. The doctor's attention was finally attracted by the stranger taking a position directly in front of this passageway so that he had to be seen.

Not very good business management in either case, was it?

CHAPTER XV.

RECORDS OF OPERATION.

IT almost goes without saying that a record should be kept of all operations and the details connected therewith—and the more complete they are the better. Many methods have been devised and there are innumerable “card systems” on the market for this purpose. It cannot be rightfully said that any one “system” is preëminently better than the others, for they all have some good features, and it is merely a matter of adopting the one that best suits the individual requirements. For general purposes, however, a card system is better than a book record.

With cards, it is possible to so divide and arrange them that while any record will be always available only the active ones need be handled and the open accounts can be so segregated as to greatly facilitate the rendering of bills and the keeping track of slow pay accounts. A card that has a space for recording general information regarding the patient, a good diagram of the surfaces of the teeth and sufficient space for the charges and credits will serve the purpose very

Records of Operation.

well—anything more than that adds to the time and labor required to keep up the records. Always have in mind that a good system is intended to simplify—not to complicate.

So many ways have been devised for recording the different operations in connection with the diagrams that it is out of the question to give space to a description of them. Any scheme of marks that can be readily understood at a glance will serve the purpose, and such schemes are usually best developed by the individual to suit his own needs.

As time goes on these records will become the most valuable accessory in the office, for in case of a fire or other accident, practically everything else could be replaced without difficulty; but if these records are destroyed they never could be entirely replaced and this would be a serious handicap when beginning practice again. For this reason the cards should be of such a size and kept in a receptacle that will permit of their being quickly removed to a place of safety should an emergency arise during the day, and of their being placed in a fireproof safe or vault when not in use.

The best time for filling out these records is when the patient leaves the chair immediately after the operation. The patient may then be asked to step to the desk in another part of the room (it would be out of place in the reception room), and

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the entire record made out in his presence; in this way mistakes are likely to be avoided, and the patient will have an opportunity to raise any questions he may desire. This is also the time to discuss charges, terms, payments, etc. More will be said in reference to this particular feature in a subsequent chapter. It is important that these records should be made at this time and on the permanent chart, for should it become necessary to bring suit to collect an account, the courts only accept, as good evidence, the original records made at the time of the operation.

The few minutes required for this work will not be lost even in a busy practice, for while it is being done the attendant should be getting the operating equipment ready for the next patient. Changing the linen on the chair, sterilizing the instruments, and getting everything spick and span in the presence of the retiring patient is a good plan, for it gives that patient an opportunity of seeing the care that is exercised and tends to increase confidence. The succeeding patient should not be allowed to enter the operating room until everything is in perfect order. Many a good patient has been lost from having been asked to sit in an untidy chair, with a litter of instruments used in previous operations all about, and by having the operator forget and pick instruments out of the mess and begin to use them.

CHAPTER XVI.

JOURNAL AND LEDGER RECORDS.

IT is essential that a complete record of all transactions be kept, in order that the conditions of the business may be known at any time. A day-book is the proper place for recording such items as these.

In keeping such a record there are four fundamental accounts, the figures of which should be readily at hand in order to conduct the practice on a sound business basis. These are: 1. The amount of business done. 2. The cash received. 3. The expense incurred. 4. The amount of money withdrawn from the business for personal use.

A simple method of separating and tabulating these items is to use a day-book that is ruled with four or more columns instead of the customary two at the right hand side of the page. A column is reserved for the figures of each of the accounts that it is desired to keep. As the items for the day are entered, the figures are placed in the proper columns and the footings carried forward from page to page until the end of the month is

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reached, when the totals are figured up and balanced. These figures may be supplemented by bringing forward the totals of the preceding months, thus giving the amounts for the year up to that date.

Putting the figures together in this way makes it easy to ascertain the condition of the business at any time; make comparisons with other years, day by day or month by month; to note how the cash receipts compare with the gross business; how the expense account compares with the net business; the exact amount that is being withdrawn from the business for personal use, so that one's private affairs may be regulated accordingly; and to know whether the practice is making a fair profit or a business loss. In keeping the expense account it will be found that there will be continual expenditures of small amounts for minor supplies, such as postage, etc., and it is unnecessary to write out each of these items in the day-book unless it is desired to have an absolute record of what each penny was spent for; a simpler way is to have a petty cash account from which all such items are paid, the total to be entered in the day-book at the end of the week under the head of sundries. The salary of the operator should, of course, be charged directly to the expense account each week, but if one prefers, the amounts withdrawn may be entered in the personal column during the month

Journal and Ledger Records.

and a balance struck, and the amount of the salary be charged to expense at that time.

Entering the amounts of the "accounts receivable" and the "accounts payable" each month, gives a still further insight into the condition of the business. In the business world, a man who does not know exactly "where he is at" is pretty apt to be in an unsafe position.

By using a card system for keeping the accounts with patients and making the day-book entries as suggested, it becomes practically unnecessary to do any double-entry bookkeeping or to keep a regular ledger. The "accounts payable" will be principally for dental supplies, stationery, etc., and of course some record of them must be kept, but there are several simple ways of doing this. If cash is paid for all supplies at the time of purchase the regular day-book entry will be all that is necessary; if a monthly account is run with the supply houses the sales slips should be filed and checked off with the regular statement received each month and a record kept of the total amount. If these accounts are paid in full at the end of the month the following simple plan may suffice; if not, it would be better to keep a regular ledger record of them.

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ACCOUNTS PAYABLE

		Items	Amount	Paid	Amount
June	—Estate.....	Office rent.	\$50.00	June 2	\$50.00
	Telephone Co.....	Service.	4.15	June 10	4.15
	Dentists' Supply Co.....	Materials.	13.45	July 6	13.45
	—Dental Laboratory....	Labor.	27.00	July 8	27.00
	F. Howard Co.....	Stationery.	18.75	July 14	18.75
July	—Estate.....	Rent.	50.00	July 1	50.00
	Telephone Co.....	Service.	4.00	July 12	4.00
	G. Scharmann.....	Burs and cements.	16.00	Aug. 1	16.00
	—Dental Laboratory....	Labor, etc.	19.00	Aug. 4	19.00
	Trenaman Co.....	Electrical repairs.	4.75		
August	—Estate.....	Rent.	50.00	Aug. 5	50.00
	Telephone Co.....	Service.	4.60	Aug. 10	4.60
	Ames & Co.....	Insurance.	22.48	Aug. 10	22.48
	Dentists' Supply Co.....	Materials.	9.60	Aug. 20	9.60
	G. Scharmann.....	Phenakit.	8.00		
	Flint & Co.....	Redecorating.	34.00		

Journal and Ledger Records.

AUGUST, 1910

Name	Items	Time	Amount	Cash	Expense	Personal
30 Mrs. E. T. Smith.	Amts. forward.		\$432.00	\$326.00	\$122.00	\$200.00
Mr. Engle.....	1 Gold, 1 Amal., 1 Cem.	2	10.00	10.00		
Mr. Sloat.....	Bridges, 1 cr., 2 dums.	2 1/2	45.00	25.00		
Miss Dibble.....	Scale and polish.	1	5.00	5.00		
Miss Hubert.....	Orthodontia (week).	3	30.00	100.00		
	Por. inlay.	1 1/2	7.50			
31 Mrs. Brown.....	3 Amal.	2	10.00			
Mrs. Bronsen.....	F. U. Denture		50.00	25.00		
Mr. Francis.....	Scale—Pyorr.	1 1/2	7.50			
G. Scharmann.....	Burs.					
Dental Laboratory	Crown and bridgework.				10.00	
Attendant.....	Salary.				18.00	
Dr. _____					8.00	25.00
Sundries.....	Petty Cash Account.				4.60	
	Amts. for August.		596.00	491.00	162.60	225.00
	Totals to date.		4,783.00	4,075.00	1,317.85	1,750.00
	Cash Bal.			1,007.15		
	Accounts Receiv.		708.00			
	Account Payable.				42.00	

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These suggestions of simple bookkeeping methods are intended principally for the average one-man practice, and with the idea of reducing the amount of labor required to the minimum. In the case of a large practice, where assistant operators and a regular secretary are employed, it may be better to use the regular double-entry system of bookkeeping throughout.

CHAPTER XVII.

CREDITS AND COLLECTIONS.

IT is not the amount of business or the number of patients that determine the business success or failure of a practice, but whether the cash receipts will equal the amount of the expenses and will show a profit at the end of the year.

Young men have been told, all too frequently, that they should not think of money in connection with their work, for to do so is sordid and mercenary; but they should think only of the beauty and poetry of their operations and the good they may be doing their fellow man. A man who follows these precepts literally will not be fulfilling his whole duty to society, for it demands that a man shall care for his own, and when he fails to do so he adds a burden to others that is morally unjust.

No man is called upon to render services that mean an actual expense to him, without some assurance that they will be paid for. This, of course, does not refer to charity work. A man is justified in giving as freely to charity as he can afford, but

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charity should not be extended to "dead beats" or to people who can well afford to pay but who will not.

There are many men who have sufficient nerve to undertake any kind of an operation, yet lack the moral courage to insist on being paid for their services. Such a course is unwise and unjust and leads to business failure.

The best time to discuss with a patient the probable amount of the fee and the terms of payment is after the preliminary examination has been made and the appointments are to be arranged for. In large cities where people move about frequently and little is known of their financial standing, it is perfectly proper and good business policy to ask that a suitable retainer be paid in advance. This is the usual course adopted by the members of the legal profession. When this is not feasible, arrangements should be made for payments at the close of the engagement, or at a definite time after the work is completed. A note should be made upon the chart of the arrangement agreed upon, so that no question will be raised when the bill is presented.

When a patient is known to be financially responsible it may be good policy not to ask for a retainer but to send a bill at the completion of the work. It is advisable, however, to have it generally understood that prompt payment is expected

Credits and Collections.

when the bill is presented unless some special arrangement has been made to the contrary. Statements should be rendered promptly upon the completion of the work. If a considerable amount of time is allowed to elapse before the statement is received the patient may forget what was done and think he has been overcharged.

A good form for a professional statement or bill will be about as follows:

.....
Mr.
to
..... D. D. S.
For professional services rendered
from
to
Received payment
.....

An itemized statement should not be rendered. If one should be requested, a reply can be made about as follows: "The bill rendered was for professional services which cannot be itemized, like so much merchandise; however, by referring to my records I find that there were engagements, occupying hours, during which time the following operations were performed gold fillings, amalgam fillings, the surgical cleansing of the teeth and roots (or whatever it

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may have been), my customary fee for the service rendered being the amount stated in the bill. Trusting that this will be satisfactory, Yours, etc." Such a reply usually ends the argument.

All bills for outstanding accounts should be sent out promptly at the end of each month. As many people pay their monthly bills in the order in which they are received, it is a good plan to send out the bills by the 28th of the month. It is the early bird that frequently catches the worm. In case a remittance is not received, it will be well in many cases to send another bill on the 15th of the following month. If an account is still outstanding at the end of the second month a bill should be sent with a request for a remittance written upon it. Should this fail to bring a response within a reasonable length of time a letter should be written stating that "professional fees are due upon the completion of the work and that credit had been given only as a matter of courtesy, that the account is overdue and a remittance is expected." Accounts that remain unpaid for three months without some explanation being made should be followed up aggressively. A plan that sometimes works effectively is to have the office attendant call upon the debtor and present the bill with a request for an answer. If this is not expedient or should fail, the account may then be turned over to a regular collector. A professional bill collector

Credits and Collections.

generally produces better results than do lawyers, who usually confine their efforts to writing letters and making threats that are seldom anything but a bluff.

In places where there are several dentists who will work together, it would be a good plan for them to agree to employ the same collector. In this way considerable information may be obtainable regarding the people that are slow pay or that evade payment of their debts. When a person is known to be poor pay or a dead beat, a dentist is entirely justified in declining to render professional services to him unless payment is made in advance.

Lawyers will frequently advise bringing suit to collect an account, but it is seldom advisable to actually take a case into court unless the amount involved is sufficient to make it well worth while, for the legal expenses will more than offset any small amount.

Referring again to the rendering of bills, we sometimes hear of professional men who only send bills to their patients once or twice a year. This may be all right in a few exceptional cases where the patients are more than well-to-do or the amounts involved are small, but in most instances it is bad business policy and is unfair to both parties concerned. In the first place, a professional man is entitled to his fee when the service is ren-

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dered or as soon thereafter as is practicable, for he has expenses which should be met promptly; again, when a bill is sent to a patient only once or twice a year, they have no means of checking it up to determine if it is correct and must depend entirely on the honesty of the doctor and the assumption that his records are correct beyond question; then, too, the bill may be for a large amount and reach the patient at such a time as will make it a hardship for him to meet it within a reasonable period. With most people it is easier and more convenient to meet small bills frequently than to pay large ones at an unexpected or inconvenient time. When accounts are allowed to run for six months or more, the interest on the amount is either lost or must be charged in the bill; the first should not be expected of the dentist and the latter is seldom expected by the patient.

Dentists have been frequently heard to say that they have been too busy to send out any bills for some months; and yet upon closer questioning they generally admit that they need the money in order to meet their expenses; and it quite often appears that these same men lose from ten to forty per cent of the amount of their gross business through inability to collect. It is very often the case that these same men will continue to work year in and year out for people who seldom or never pay their bills and seem satisfied to delude themselves with,

Credits and Collections.

and take pride in talking about, the size of their practice.

Professional men are proverbially poor business men, and in no way do they show it more than in the lax way in which they handle their accounts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GENERAL APPLICATION OF THE HOUR CHARGE.

It will very often be asked, "Do you charge for examinations or treatments?" The answer is a decided, yes. Why not? A dentist certainly does not gape into a person's mouth from any pleasure that may be derived from so doing, but because it is a matter of business. Patients do not ask a dentist to examine their mouths merely to satisfy his supposed curiosity regarding their condition but to satisfy their own and to get some advice. In order that a dentist may be able to make such an examination and give competent advice about the condition found, it is necessary that he should have a professional education, maintain an office and suitable equipment, and consume time which has a definite value to him. This being the case, he should ask and receive a fee for this service the same as for any other.

As a general rule, an examination or consultation will occupy about a quarter of an hour, and a regular fee for this service should be established that will represent a fair proportion of the customary hour charge. If, however, the service re-

General Application of the Hour Charge.

quires more time than this, the fee should be increased accordingly.

For all general operative work the charge is made according to the amount of time involved.

In crown work the regular charge is made for the operative time (preparing the root, fitting, setting, etc.) plus a laboratory charge which should cover the cost of materials, time, and a fair profit. Bridgework is estimated in the same way—that is, a definite price per tooth as the laboratory charge plus the regular fee for operative time.

In case of dentures it may seem advisable to have a definite fee for each of the various kinds, but the rate should be as high as possible and be governed largely by the time involved and the artistic ability displayed.

The extraction of teeth is a major surgical operation that may involve the health and even the life of the patient, and it should always be considered as such, and a suitable fee asked accordingly. No self-respecting professional man should think of performing a surgical operation for what is considered small change or the price of a hair cut; nor should a surgical operation be performed without charge because a mechanical one is to follow it, as is the case when teeth are extracted free if a denture is to be made. If the services of a dental surgeon are not worthy of a higher rating than this—why be one?

CHAPTER XIX.

INCREASING THE FEES.

THE law of supply and demand, which has to do with the regulation of so many things in the business world, may also be utilized for regulating professional fees as well.

In a previous chapter a method was described whereby a dentist could determine the minimum fee that he could safely afford to charge if some degree of financial success was to be attained. In the chapter on appointments it was suggested that only a limited number of engagements be planned for each day and the days filled as far in advance as possible.

In applying this aforesaid law, the limited number of hours and a reasonable number of days represents the supply, and the number of appointments that can be made represents the demand. When the number of patients desiring a certain dentist's services becomes so great that his appointments are made weeks in advance and there are still requests for time, then he is justified in raising the amount of his fee per hour.

Increasing the Fees.

This will tend to decrease the number of patients, but it will also increase the income of the dentist with but the same expenditure of energy on his part. When the demand for his services at the increased rate again exceeds a reasonable limit he is once more in a position to make an increase in his fees. And so it may continue—the limit to which fees may be advanced being only determined by the demand for services.

In the meantime, there is an incentive for the dentist to render the very best services in his power so that he may attract an increasing number of better class or wealthier patients. Such a procedure means an everchanging set of patients; but no man need feel compelled to continue to render his services at five dollars an hour if he is able to obtain ten; and if by this method he is enabled to continually improve the technique and value of his services, thereby increasing his income, he should be satisfied to lose patients and confine his attention to those who can appreciate and afford them.

Some may ask, what is to become of the patients that cannot afford to pay these increased fees? They will naturally drift to the younger men whose fees may still be low; and this will be the means of giving some other man a chance to get ahead. It will then work out the same as it does in the commercial world—not everyone can afford to patronize a Tiffany, but there are always shops

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of all degrees to meet the wants of all purses; nor are these shops really the competitors of a Tiffany, but rather they serve as feeders, for it is but human nature to desire better things as one's income increases; and this trait shows itself in all things.

The only competition that a professional man need recognize is that which may exist between his desires and his ability.

The man who tries to work for all the people at any price may be satisfied with his success up to a certain point, but as a rule he is one that is doing but very little to advance the standards of his profession.

CHAPTER XX.

NOTES.

A SPECIFIC treatise on any method or its application is usually limited in its usefulness to the immediate now and the immediate few, while the exposition of a few general principles may be of service for some time to come. Having this in mind no attempt has been made to discuss all the phases of any of the subjects presented, but rather it has been the intention to suggest an idea that might establish a train of thought in the mind of the reader that would enable him to adapt the methods to his own practice, and with the hope of arousing a wider discussion of the general subject so that all may benefit thereby.

Very little has been said about the technique of operations, for it is taken for granted that every man is striving to attain the highest standards as an operator and to render the best services possible to his patients.

It would be possible to add several more chapters to this book on such subjects as general deportment, the winning of patients, etc., but these

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subjects have been handled so admirably by DR. C. N. JOHNSON in his treatise "Success in Dental Practice" that the writer prefers to refer his readers to that book for the information.

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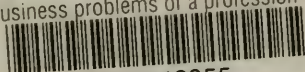
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